

M E S S I A H

A Sacred Oratorio

by

G.F. HANDEL

Alison Barlow  
Christopher O'Donnell  
Judith Harris  
Gareth Roberts  
David Hoult

soprano  
treble  
contralto  
tenor  
bass

NORTHERN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA  
(Leader: Fay Campey)

Murray Greig

trumpet

conductor

JOHN BETHELL

PART 1

THE OVERTURE — Handel calls it 'Sinfonia' — opens with a solemn grave, followed by a lively allegro which sets off like a fugue. The strict fugal form is abandoned after the first few entries, and the fugal idea is pursued only in free imitation. After the E major astringency of the overture, the E major string group introducing the first recitative has a lovely promising sound. The tenor solo announces that the Redeemer will soon be here, and the chorus takes up the happy message in a big allegro movement 'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed'. The bass soloist's proclamation in the recitative 'Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth' is longer and more impassioned, and in the aria the question 'But who may abide the day of His coming?' is pressed with ever increasing ardour. The following contralto solo 'O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion' communicates a mood of cheerful confidence, and this is joyfully substantiated by the chorus. The bass aria 'The people that walked in darkness' with its uncanny unison passages for the strings, prepares the way for the great event of the first part, the chorus 'For unto us a child is born'. This chorus builds up with majestic grandeur 'He is a mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, this child that is born to save us'. The shepherd scene is delightfully created; the episode is introduced by a delicate orchestral pasturale scored not for woodwind as one might have imagined, but for strings alone. The soprano soloist raising her voice for the first time, now takes the lead in the role of the Angel of the Annunciation. The following arias are also entrusted to her; the gay and lively song of jubilation 'Rejoice greatly' and the lovely aria with the contralto 'He shall feed His flock'. The first part ends with a long excited choral fugue 'His yoke is easy'.